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THE STANDARDIZATION OF THE NEW ENGLAND HIGH SCHOOLS

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Undoubtedly the great defect of the schools of New England is lack of uniformity. One town will have a magnificent equipment, expert supervision, and well-paid and professionally trained teachers; while a neighboring town only a few miles away may have poorly ventilated buildings, little or no supervision, underpaid teachers, no *esprit de corps*, with consequent poor instruction in the schools. Again, we too often find the following conditions: A high school under one principal may be doing excellent work, easily preparing its graduates for college. Under his successor the work of the school may fall far below standard, but as long as the discipline is fairly good, and the teacher is popular with his pupils and in the community, the matter of scholarship is of little or no consequence. The same holds good too often of teachers in the elementary schools and assistants in the high schools. We admit that the intellectual is not the only criterion by which to judge the efficiency of a teacher, but it is nevertheless the *sine qua non* of good teaching.

In order to correct these defects we must have something more stable than local sentiment to build upon. As long as each community fixes its own standards, so long there is bound to be the greatest diversity in our schools. It is very evident, to the casual observer even, that something should be done to better high-school conditions in New England. Can we look to the higher institutions of learning for help? Does the present school system contain potentially the means of correcting its own defects? If neither of these affords a solution of the difficulty, we must look elsewhere for the suggestions of a solution.

In the February issue of the *School Review* I discussed the standing of the New England high schools, using the standard

of the College Entrance Certificate Board as a basis of judgment. The results of that inquiry were not in the least flattering to the high schools, taken as a whole, although those sending on certificate are doing commendably well. Briefly summarized, we showed that a considerable proportion of high schools failed to attain the necessary standard, although by reason of equipment and teaching force they should be doing a satisfactory grade of work, sufficiently so to meet the demands of the college. We also called attention especially to the smaller high school, both weak and strong, which under present conditions must of necessity fail to do a good quality of work.

How large the number of non-standard high schools is may be gathered from the following table:

	Me.	N. H.	Vt.	Mass.	R. I.	Conn.
No. high schools	147	57	64	245	20	77
No. approved	25	17	9	112	11	15
No. not approved	122	40	55	133	9	62
No. with fewer than 30 pupils	61	18	21	42	1	16
Not approved with more than 30 pupils.	61	22	34	91	8	46

So far as our present purpose is concerned these may be classified as follows:

1. Schools with a very small attendance, possibly only ten or fifteen. Generally speaking, these schools should be allowed to continue only when the pupils cannot be transported to neighboring schools, or when several communities cannot unite to form a larger school. If they must continue, let them be greatly improved.

2. Schools with from thirty to one hundred pupils, but often with a two- or three-year course of study, a totally inadequate teaching force, little if anything of library or of scientific apparatus, and sometimes in cramped and poorly appointed rooms. With this class of schools the present paper is largely concerned.

3. Schools adequately equipped, but which, either from poor supervision or from low standards, are doing indifferent work and showing poor results. These need toning up. Under proper management they could soon attain a high degree of efficiency.

But is our standard too high? Are we justified in taking as our criterion the ability to prepare for college?

For my part I do not think that this standard is at all too high, nor do I believe that the colleges require too much either in quantity or in quality. At least, my experience has led me to this conclusion. Four years of study, with eighteen or twenty recitations a week, is sufficient in quantity, while the quality is certainly the minimum which the average boy or girl should attain. If the better pupils in a class are unable to do advanced work, what, pray, must be the intellectual accomplishments of the poorest member of that class? Measure him by any fair standard. Is his knowledge clear-cut and definite? Can he reason with any degree of accuracy? Can he read, understand, and express himself? Is he equipped for hard, honest work? If he has spent four years of time in the secondary school without acquiring such habits of mind, somebody has been fearfully negligent. We must also remember that the colleges generally are very liberal in offering a wide range of electives for admission—so wide, in fact, that any respectable high-school programme could easily provide therefor.

Taking it for granted, then, that an effort should be made to standardize the high schools, how are we to secure this end? Is there any possibility that the New England colleges, to promote their own interests, will seriously undertake this work? Does the school system of New England contain within itself the possibility of decided and uniform improvement? Let us state, first of all, the attitude of the colleges; then briefly review the possibilities of the present school system's bettering itself.

The attitude of the colleges is well represented by the College Certificate Board. With the advent of this board we cherished the hope that a solution of the vexed problem of articulation between school and college was at hand, that tangible results in the shape of better inspection would follow. But unfortunately the board chose to place rigid limits to its sphere of usefulness by confining itself entirely to the effort to see that no unprepared student gets into college. The school that vouches for such a graduate is deprived of the certificate right, no matter

if the college is equally to blame for the failure. Further, the board does not make any pretense of inspecting the schools by visiting them and seeing what is actually being done. By so doing, by suggestion and helpful criticism, the board might become a powerful factor—yes, the most powerful factor—in education in New England. But no; the secondary school is left to itself to correct its own faults as best it may; to grope in darkness until it gains the light, if haply it does attain thereto. Whether it finally chanches upon the right path, or continues upon the road which leads to non-certification, are matters which do not concern the board; for its province is not to minister unto, not to lend a friendly hand or a helpful suggestion, but only to close the doors and bolt them tight against backward and erring schools.

The Certificate Board in so doing is entirely consistent with New England traditions. The colleges are in no sense maintained by public taxation, and in turn have no responsibility in the matter of inspecting the high schools. And while we grant that the colleges indirectly influence the secondary schools, that college professors are willing to address conventions of secondary teachers, and that the Association of Schools and Colleges is doing good service within its sphere, yet no one of these agencies, nor all of them combined, by reason of imposed limitations, can do the work required. They are all very well in their way, but they do not go far enough; they do not attempt any constructive system of inspection.

We must, however, acknowledge that the same unfortunate situation obtains everywhere in New England; there is no system of education; each town or city has its system, but there is lacking that impetus and solidarity which come from organization and centralized authority. No one of the six New England states has what can in any true sense be called a centralized school system reaching through the high school even. The colleges are separate institutions, in no wise connected officially or unofficially with the secondary schools.

In order to emphasize this most patent and yet most unfortunate feature of New England's schools, I quote from the

report of Miss Mary M. Abbot, of the Collegiate Alumnae of Connecticut. This organization made a careful study of school conditions in its own state, and has given an exhaustive and admirable report. Miss Abbott says:

The most appalling fact seems to be that we do not offer equal advantages to all the children of school age within our borders. The greatest discrepancy exists between our best schools and our poorest. The cause for this unfair treatment of our children seems clearly to lie in our system of management. Instead of having our schools under one system of management, and thereby bringing about a certain degree of uniformity in the advantages they offer, we have about one thousand separate and distinct systems, each absolutely independent of every other and perfectly secure in conducting poor schools, if its own community demands no better.

What is true of Connecticut is also true of the other New England states. There is no uniformity, and each community sets its own standard of attainment.

The secretary of the Collegiate Alumnae, Mrs. Lucretia A. Cummings, in criticizing the district system says:

Here is the greatest dearth of superintendence. Here is the stronghold of favoritism in making appointments. Here has been found the school-board member who became acting visitor, then secured himself as teacher, then paid his own salary and supervised his own work. Under this head is the town where forty-two school officials are elected to care for seventy-five school children—ample provision for "individual attention."

Order in Valuation of Property	City	Taxable Property Appropriated for Public Schools in Mills and 100ths by Town Tax	Rank in Amount Received from State	Order in Valuation of Property	Town	Taxable Property Appropriated for Public Schools in Mills and 100ths by Town Tax	No. of Pupils in High School	Rank in Amount Received from State
1	New Haven....	3.68	1	43	New Milford...	4.23	60	37
2	Bridgeport....	3.53	2	61	Stratford.....	6.91	37	40
3	Hartford.....	2.51	3	81	Saybrook.....	5.08	46	91
5	Stamford.....	4.97	8	65	Bethel.....	8.83	83	51
6	Meriden.....	5.56	6	48	Farmington...	4.18	71	56
9	New Britain...	7.25	5	37	East Hartford..	6.44	65	27
10	New London...	5.01	11	64	Watertown...	5.11	37	58
11	Manchester...	3.15	17	84	Woodbury....	4.98	34	83
13	Ansonia.....	5.08	12	53	Windsor.....	4.84	59	49
14	Middletown...	2.32	13	58	Portland.....	5.99	43	50
				61	Stafford.....	13.19	60	39

It now remains to be seen whether the smaller towns are already bearing their share of the expense of public education. In order to answer this question we must get at the facts of the case. In the preceding table all the cities and towns named have public high schools.

In examining the above table we must bear in mind that it is much easier for the wealthy cities to give out of their abundance than for relatively poor towns to contribute from their meager resources. It requires greater self-denial for a man worth one thousand dollars to part with one hundred of it, than for his neighbor worth ten thousand dollars to pay out one-tenth of his wealth.

This table is fairly representative of the expense of education in communities of different sizes. In the larger cities the absolute cost per pupil is much greater, but the relative cost considerably less. The table clearly shows three things: First, the small towns which support high schools are already doing all that can be asked of them. They are contributing a higher percentage of their taxable property than the large and wealthy cities. Second, the money distributed by the state for educational purposes does not go to the towns which most need it. For instance, Hartford, reputed to be the wealthiest city of its size in the United States, receives as much per pupil as the poorest town within the borders of Connecticut. This is absurd. Third, it is manifestly unfair to ask the small towns to increase their tax-rate, or to favor high-school education to the detriment of the elementary school.

The only conclusion to be drawn from the foregoing discussion warrants us in maintaining that the small non-standard high schools can be bettered only from without. In other words, the state, which has assumed the task of education, must give greater help to these schools, and at the same time undertake the work of a thoroughgoing and constructive system of inspection.

First of all, the state must make it possible for the high school to do good work. To secure this would require a four-year course of study, a teaching force sufficiently large to handle such a course, and sufficient apparatus for physics and chemistry.

There is need also of better school libraries. Contrast these possible conditions with what we find in many places: very often only a two- or three-year course of study, one or two teachers for thirty or fifty pupils. Sometimes we find three teachers trying to handle a four-year course of study in a school of eighty-five pupils. Teachers hear from thirty to forty-five recitations a week in widely different subjects. Often the sciences cannot be taught for lack of apparatus, or else are taught only from textbook.

Is it right to work under such disadvantages? Every educator will answer that it is vicious for the pupil's best development, to say nothing of the drudgery imposed upon the teacher. Is it necessary? With the vast amount of material wealth in the New England states, no one can plead poverty. Wisconsin appropriates annually \$100,000 for her "free high schools." Surely every state in New England can do as well, if need be.

In order to be more precise, let us get at the facts as closely as possible. We saw by the table of approved schools that Maine had sixty-one non-approved schools with more than thirty pupils; New Hampshire, twenty-two; Vermont, thirty-four; Massachusetts, ninety-one; Rhode Island, eight; and Connecticut, forty-six. From a cursory examination I am persuaded that about two-thirds of these schools need further state aid. Suppose the states should each place an extra teacher in everyone of these schools, at an expense of \$500 and besides give the school \$100 a year for apparatus. Suppose the standard teaching force in high schools were put on the following basis: schools with from thirty to fifty pupils, three teachers; schools with from fifty to seventy-five pupils, four teachers; schools with from seventy-five to one hundred pupils, five teachers. If such a policy should be adopted by each state, high-school education would receive a tremendous impetus, and all these schools would soon be doing an excellent quality of work. For the small school, provided it has an adequate teaching force, can do for the individual pupil what the city high school, with its larger attendance, cannot possibly undertake to do.

But what would be the cost to the several states of securing

a standard system of high schools? On the basis of the state's giving \$600 annually to two-thirds of the non-approved high schools with an attendance of thirty or more pupils, it would cost Maine \$24,000; New Hampshire, \$8,400; Vermont, \$13,200; Massachusetts, \$24,000; Rhode Island, \$2,400; and Connecticut, \$30,000. With no one of these states can any reasonable person raise a doubt on the question of money. The general policy of state legislatures toward education has always been a liberal one. If the question is fairly and intelligently presented, I am sure no legislature in New England would hesitate on the matter of expense.

It now becomes necessary to define more clearly what we mean by the term "inspection." We use the word in its fullest acceptation, but in no wise would we wish to come in conflict with the local principal or superintendent of schools; there is absolutely no need of any clash. By inspection of high schools we mean: (1) A competent educator, in an official capacity, should visit the school. He should scrutinize such details as the course of study, daily programme, library and laboratory facilities. (2) He should visit the classrooms, observe the methods of instruction as well as the discipline. When advisable, he should make helpful suggestions, criticizing tactfully and constructively, always stimulating a teacher to do his best work, and pointing the way to something better. (3) He should use his influence with the school board, whenever necessary, to secure better conditions for work. (4) He should aid in interpreting the course of study, suiting it as nearly as possible to the three potent factors which determine the curriculum of a school—the community, the elementary school, and the college. I believe that an inspector of high schools can do an invaluable service to the cause of education by articulating the high school with the grammar school and the college, so that educational development will be continuous from the kindergarten through the university.

The above contains little that is new. But it does attempt, by including what is in successful operation elsewhere, to do two things: first, to make high-school education a worthy end in itself, to insure to the pupil who does not choose to continue

his education in the higher institutions of learning a scholastic training which shall be rigid, thorough, and comprehensive; second, to make it possible, so far as teaching force, curriculum, and equipment go, for every high school with an attendance of thirty or more, to do good work; then, by a system of constructive inspection, not merely to see that good results follow, but rather to help where help is needed, to strengthen the weak, to counsel and to advise. For the logical corollary of special state aid is state inspection. State inspection would also tend to do away with the vicious elements of sentiment and local autonomy as they exist in our present system of schools.

Other advantages would follow the standardizing and inspection of our high schools. Chief among these we may mention the influence upon the elementary schools. Any effort to better the high schools has a decided bearing upon the grammar schools, leading to better-prepared teachers, a higher quality of instruction, and on the part of the pupil a greater incentive to study. The normal schools also could do strictly normal-school work. Under present conditions many of our normal schools are obliged to devote a considerable part of their time to academic studies at the expense of legitimate normal-school instruction.